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DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM SY SA EG LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI OPPOSES BERRI'S NATIONAL DIALOGUE;
WILL RETURN TO BEIRUT SOON

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) During an April 7 telephone conversation with the Charge, majority leader Saad Hariri, from Riyadh, said that March 14 "needed to work hard" to stop parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's appeal for a new round of the National Dialogue. Noting that Saudi King Abdullah would be meeting the Egyptians and discussing Lebanon, Saad predicted that Berri will fail to gain Arab capitals' support for the Dialogue. Saad will return to Lebanon shortly and will then meet with March 14 leaders to discuss cabinet expansion and other issues. End summary.

MARCH 14 WELL-POSITIONED

¶2. (S) On April 7, the Charge called majority leader Saad Hariri, who has been out of the country for nearly six weeks. Noting that he will be joining Prime Minister Fouad Siniora for meetings with Saudi leadership on April 8, an upbeat Saad said he would be returning to Beirut shortly. He agreed that March 14 has been in a good position since the Arab League summit and that Fares Suaid was doing well in his new role as March 14 Secretary General.

MARCH 14 NEEDS TO STOP BERRI

¶3. (S) Rejecting Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's attempt to renew the National Dialogue, Saad said that March 14 "needed to work hard" to stop Berri's effort. He remarked that this was a transparent and obvious attempt by Berri "to take the pressure off of Syria." This is unacceptable, Saad said. He could not confirm that March 14 was unanimous in opposing Berri's call for a National Dialogue, but said that its leaders needed to discuss their position on this and other matters, to include the electoral law and March 14's plans post-Arab League Summit, when he returns to Beirut. Berri is trying to scuttle the Arab League initiative, Saad said, and March 14 would not let him do so. (Note: Druze leader Walid Jumblatt has publicly said he would support the Dialogue. End note.)

¶4. (S) Scoffing at Berri's trip earlier that day to Damascus, Saad said, "He's gone to see his masters." Saad does not believe that Berri will get "approval" to visit either Riyadh or Cairo, as he intends. He noted that Saudi King Abdullah

plans to travel to Cairo on April 9 to see Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, adding that, "This will get the message across that there's no point in Berri going to see the Egyptians."

TABLE CABINET EXPANSION, FOR NOW

15. (S) Responding to the Charge's inquiry on cabinet expansion, Saad said this issue required further discussion within the March 14 leadership upon his return to Lebanon. He added that cabinet expansion would be best discussed at the end of April, after Berri "tries" for the 18th time to hold the presidential election. (Comment: Saad seemed somewhat open to the idea of cabinet expansion, and said he would discuss this further with the Charge when he returns. End comment.) He also told the Charge the idea of establishing a deadline for presidential elections required further discussion within March 14.

WORKING WITH INDEPENDENT SHIA

16. (S) Saad acknowledged the Charge's suggestion that he meet with more independent Shia, saying that his key advisor on Shia issues was with him in Riyadh (Bassem Saba), and he would introduce him to the Charge upon his return.

SISON